Paraphrasing and How to Recognize and Avoid Inadvertent Plagiarism

The following information comes from Purdue University's "Online Writing Lab."

Summary:

There are few intellectual offenses more serious than plagiarism in academic and professional contexts. This resource offers advice on how to avoid plagiarism in your work.

Most students, of course, don't intend to plagiarize. In fact, most realize that citing sources actually builds their credibility for an audience and even helps writers to better grasp information relevant to a topic or course of study. Mistakes in citation and crediting can still happen, so here are certain practices that can help you not only avoid plagiarism, but even improve the efficiency and organization of your research and writing.

Best Practices for Research and Drafting
Reading and Note-Taking

- In your notes, always mark someone else's words with a big **Q**, for quote, or use big quotation marks
- Indicate in your notes which ideas are taken from sources with a big **S**, and which are your own insights (**ME**)
- When information comes from sources, record relevant documentation in your notes (book and article titles; URLs on the Web)

Interviewing and Conversing

- Take lots of thorough notes; if you have any of your own thoughts as you're interviewing, mark them clearly
- If your subject will allow you to record the conversation or interview (and you have proper clearance to do so through an Institutional Review Board, or IRB), place your recording device in an optimal location between you and the speaker so you can hear clearly when you review the recordings. Test your equipment, and bring plenty of backup batteries and media.
- If you're interviewing via email, retain copies of the interview subject's emails as well as the ones you send in reply
- Make any additional, clarifying notes immediately after the interview has concluded

Writing Paraphrases or Summaries

- Use a statement that credits the source somewhere in the paraphrase or summary, e.g., According to Jonathan Kozol, ...
- If you're having trouble summarizing, try writing your paraphrase or summary of a text without looking at the original, relying only on your memory and notes
- Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text; correct any errors in content accuracy, **and be sure to use quotation marks to set off any exact phrases from the original text** [boldface not in original document added by Julie McCarty]
- Check your paraphrase or summary against sentence and paragraph structure, as copying those is also considered plagiarism.

- **Put quotation marks around any unique words or phrases that you cannot or do not want to change**, e.g., "savage inequalities" exist throughout our educational system (Kozol). [boldface not in original document added by Julie McCarty]

Writing Direct Quotations

- Keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote
- Mark the quote with quotation marks, or set it off from your text in its own block, per the style guide your paper follows
- Quote no more material than is necessary; if a short phrase from a source will suffice, don't quote an entire paragraph
- To shorten quotes by removing extra information, use ellipsis points (...) to indicate omitted text, keeping in mind that:
  - Three ellipsis points indicates an in-sentence ellipsis, and four points for an ellipsis between two sentences
- To give context to a quote or otherwise add wording to it, place added words in brackets, []; be careful not to editorialize or make any additions that skew the original meaning of the quote—do that in your main text, e.g.,
  - **OK**: Kozol claims there are "savage inequalities" in our educational system, which is obvious.
  - **WRONG**: Kozol claims there are "[obvious] savage inequalities" in our educational system.
- Use quotes that will have the most rhetorical, argumentative impact in your paper; too many direct quotes from sources may weaken your credibility, as though you have nothing to say yourself, and will certainly interfere with your style

Writing About Another's Ideas

· Note the name of the idea's originator in the sentence or throughout a paragraph about the idea

· Use parenthetical citations, footnotes, or endnotes to refer readers to additional sources about the idea, as necessary

· Be sure to use quotation marks around key phrases or words that the idea's originator used to describe the idea

The following information from "The Writing Place Service" at Northwestern University may be more helpful, or more confusing. The most important thing for you to look at is the section about what constitutes acceptable paraphrasing. Look closely at the example of the original and the acceptably paraphrased example at the end of this section. You will see that the paraphrasing author does not use any of the original author's key words or phrases and thus nothing is required to be contained with quotation marks however it is still necessary to provide either a footnote or parenthetical references at the end of the

passage.
Avoiding two common forms of accidental plagiarism

1. Paraphrases with no citation

Because a paraphrase is supposed to contain all of the author's information and none of your own commentary, a paraphrase with no citation is an example of plagiarism. The St. Martin's Handbook defines an appropriate paraphrase as follows:

A **paraphrase** accurately states all the relevant information from a passage *in your own words and phrasing,* without any additional comments or elaborations [it] always restates *all* the main points of the passage in the same order and in about the same number of words. (Lunsford and Connors 596)

Lunsford and Connors go on to give two examples of unacceptable paraphrases: one that uses the author's words, and one that uses the author's sentences structures (597).

Lunsford and Connors also state that "even for acceptable paraphrases you must include a citation in your essay identifying the source of the information" (597). This point is crucial: *without the information about the source, an appropriate paraphrase becomes plagiarism.*

Even if you have avoided using the author's words, sentences structure, or style, an unattributed paraphrase is plagiarism because it presents the same information in the same order.

2. Misplaced Citations

If you use a paraphrase or direct quotation, it is important to place the reference at the very end of all the material cited. Any quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material that comes *after* the reference is plagiarized: it looks like it is supposed to be your own idea.

This is one reason why accurate note taking is so important; it is possible to forget which words are yours and which are the original writers.

Examples of misplaced citation plagiarism:

Original source:

Paraphrasing material helps you digest a passage, because chances are you can't restate the passage in your own words unless you grasp its full meaning. When you incorporate an accurate paraphrase into your essay, you show your readers that you understand that source. (Lunsford and Connors 596)

Unacceptable Paraphrased example

Lunsford and Connors say that paraphrasing is useful because "[p]araphrasing material helps you digest a passage, because chances are you can't restate the passage in your own words unless you grasp its full meaning" (596). When you incorporate an accurate paraphrase into your essay, you show your readers your understanding of that source.

Explanation

The reader would logically assume that the sentence following the citation is your own comment on the quotation, when it is actually part of the original quote.

Finally, a point about multiple citations from the same source: cite them all individually. It is not adequate to give one citation at the end of the paragraph for a bunch of individual points abstracted from a source.

Parenthetical citations are intended to make citing your sources easy to do; don't be shy about using them.

Works Cited
Lunsford, Andrea, and Robert Connors, *St. Martin's Handbook*, 3rd. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995)

Example of acceptable paraphrase: putting the idea in your own words

The following passage appears in *St. Martin's Handbook* on pages 597-98, however, key words and phrases in the original have been boldfaced, and the changes in wording and sentence structure in the paraphrase are underlined. The passage itself originally appears in *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo,* by Hayden Herrera.

Original

But **Frida's outlook was vastly different** from that of the Surrealists. Her art was not the **product of a disillusioned European culture** searching for an **escape from the limits of logic** by **plumbing the subconscious**. Instead, **her fantasy was a product of her temperament, life, and place**; it was a way of **coming to terms with reality**, not of **passing beyond reality** into another realm.

Works Cited
Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 258

Acceptable Paraphrase

As Herrera explains, Frida's surrealistic vision was unlike that of the European Surrealists. While their art grew out of their disenchantment with society and their desire to explore the subconscious mind as a refuge from rational thinking , Frida's vision was an outgrowth of her own personality and life experiences in Mexico . She used her surrealistic images to understand better her actual life, not to create a dreamworld (258).

The following are some further examples taken from *The Writing Center* at the University of Wisconsin

Examples of Unacceptable Paraphrasing with Explanation

Paraphrasing is often defined as putting a passage from an author into "your own words." But what are your own words? How different must your paraphrase be from the original? The paragraphs below provide an example by showing a passage as it appears in the source (A), two paraphrases that follow the source too closely (B and C), and a legitimate paraphrase (D). The student's intention was to incorporate the material in the original passage A into a section of a paper on the concept of "experts" that compared the functions of experts and non-experts in several professions.

1. **The Passage as It Appears in the Source** *(indented to indicate a lengthy direct quotation)*

Critical care nurses function in a hierarchy of roles. In this open heart surgery unit, the nurse manager hires and fires the nursing personnel. The nurse manager does not directly care for patients but follows the progress of unusual or long-term patients. On each shift a nurse assumes the role of resource nurse. This person oversees the hour-by-hour functioning of the unit as a whole, such as considering expected admissions and discharges of patients, ascertaining that beds are available for patients in the operating room, and covering sick calls. Resource nurses also take a patient assignment. They are the most experienced of all the staff nurses. The nurse clinician has a separate job description and provides for quality of care by orienting new staff, developing unit policies, and providing direct support where needed, such as assisting in emergency situations. The clinical nurse specialist in this unit is mostly involved with formal teaching in orienting new staff. The nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist are

the designated experts. They do not take patient assignments. The resource nurse is seen as both a caregiver and a resource to other caregivers… Staff nurses have a hierarchy of seniority… Staff nurses are assigned to patients to provide all their nursing care. (Chase, 1995, p. 156)

Work Cited
Chase, S. K. (1995). The social context of critical care clinical judgment. *Heart and Lung*, 24, 154-162.

1. **Word-for-Word Plagiarism**

Critical care nurses have a hierarchy of roles. The nurse manager hires and fires nurses. S/he does not directly care for patients but does follow unusual or long-term cases. On each shift a resource nurse attends to the functioning of the unit as a whole, such as making sure beds are available in the operating room, and also has a patient assignment. The nurse clinician orients new staff, develops policies, and provides support where needed. The clinical nurse specialist also orients new staff, mostly by formal teaching. The nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist, as the designated experts, do not take patient assignments. The resource nurse is not only a caregiver but a resource to the other caregivers. Within the staff nurses there is also a hierarchy of seniority. Their job is to give assigned patients all their nursing care.

Notice that the writer has not only "borrowed" Chase's material (the results of her research) with no acknowledgment, but has also largely maintained the author's method of expression and sentence structure. The underlined phrases are directly copied from the source or changed only slightly in form. ==Even if the student-writer had acknowledged Chase as the source of the content, the language of the passage would be considered plagiarized because no quotation marks indicate the phrases that come directly from Chase.== And if quotation marks did appear around all these phrases, this paragraph would be so cluttered that it would be unreadable.

1. **A Patchwork Paraphrase**

Chase (1995) described how nurses in a critical care unit function in a hierarchy that places designated experts at the top and the least senior staff nurses at the bottom. The experts--the nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist--are not involved directly in patient care. The staff nurses, in contrast, are assigned to patients and provide all their nursing care. Within the staff nurses is a hierarchy of seniority in which the most senior can become resource nurses: they are assigned a patient but also serve

as <u>a resource to other</u> <u>caregivers</u>. The experts have administrative and teaching tasks such as selecting and <u>orienting new staff, developing unit policies</u>, and giving hands-on <u>support where needed</u>.

<mark>*This paraphrase is a patchwork composed of pieces in the original author's language (underlined) and pieces in the student-writer's words, all rearranged into a new pattern, but with none of the borrowed pieces in quotation marks. Thus, even though the writer acknowledges the source of the material, the underlined phrases are falsely presented as the student's own.*</mark>

Is It Plagiarism Yet?

Finally here is some further explanation from Purdue University's Online Writing Center. There are some actions that can almost unquestionably be labeled plagiarism. Some of these include **buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper** (including copying an entire paper or article from the Web); **hiring someone to write your paper** for you; and **copying large sections of text** from a source without quotation marks or proper citation.

But then there are actions that are usually in more of a gray area. Some of these include using the words of a source too closely when paraphrasing (where quotation marks should have been used) or building on someone's ideas without citing their spoken or written work.

So let's look at some strategies for avoiding even suspicion of plagiarism in the first place.

When do we give credit?

The key to avoiding plagiarism is to make sure you give credit where it is due. This may be credit for something somebody said, wrote, emailed, drew, or implied. Many professional organizations, including the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA), have lengthy guidelines for citing sources. However, students are often so busy trying to learn the rules of MLA format and style or APA format and style that they sometimes forget exactly what needs to be credited. Here is **a brief list of what needs to be credited or documented**:

- Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, website, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium

- Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing

- When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase

- When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials

- When you reuse or repost any digital media, including images, audio, video, or other media

Bottom line, document any words, ideas, or other productions that originate somewhere outside of you. There are certain things that do not need documentation or credit, including:

- Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject

- When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments

- When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.

- When you are using "common knowledge," things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but **not** historical documents)

- When you are using generally-accepted facts (e.g., pollution is bad for the environment) including facts that are accepted within particular discourse communities (e.g., in the field of composition studies, "writing is a process" is a generally-accepted fact).

Deciding if something is "common knowledge"
Generally speaking, you can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources. Additionally, it might be common knowledge if you think the information you're presenting is something your readers will already know, or something that a person could easily find in general reference sources. But when in doubt, cite; if the citation turns out to be unnecessary, your teacher or editor will tell you.

For much more writing information of all kinds see the site map for Purdue University's Online Writing Lab:
Purdue University Online Writing Lab (Links to an external site.)